



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

CFA's Perspective on the Guardian Issue

The Cat Fanciers' Association strongly supports caring and responsible pet ownership.

CFA opposes the word "guardian" either in animal related laws or in common usage and rejects the notion that a warm sounding word will benefit animals or eliminate their exploitation or abuse. On the contrary, the term shows disrespect for animal owners who value their pets as family members and who take responsibility for their actions.

The "guardian" campaign, led by In Defense of Animals (IDA), is linked to the denunciation of the status of animals as personal property. Under current law animals are considered property and they are protected from abuse or cruel treatment. Animals greatly benefit humans and the relationship between pets and owners provide mutual enrichment. Well-established property rights protect our abilities to possess, transfer, provide care and plan reproduction as long as it is humane.

Ownership and guardianship as legal concepts are not the same. If the human model of guardianship were to be transferred to animals and they become "wards" it should be understood - guardianship offers no personal rights for the guardian and the courts and public agencies can grant or revoke guardianships.

Understanding the "guardian" issue:

Inserting the term "guardian" in laws legitimizes the profound larger goal of animal rights extremists to remove the rights of animal owners. Proponents clearly want to transform the legal status of animals in order to extend their "rights" through the courts. **THE FIRST STEP IS LANGUAGE CHANGE!**

Introduction of the "guardian" word is a concept that has been planned since 1990. This is not a harmless or warm endearing gesture but actually a incremental part of the "revolution" described by Dr. Elliot Katz of In Defense of Animals to *"free animals from the exploitation, suffering and bondage imposed on them by their current status as property."*

IDA has rallied supporters for their national campaign - "They Are Not Our Property, We Are Not Their Owners". Their claim is that this concept will eliminate what they believe is "exploitation" and ill treatment when pets are thought of as "things". Dr. Katz says that there is a moral distinction - "an owner buys, a guardian adopts or rescues".¹ He has stated "oppression is inherent when a being is property", and "Now is the time to get rid of the concept of pet ownership". IDA and other proponents of the "guardian" campaign believe that "liberating" pet animals from ownership is equivalent to the slavery and women's suffrage movements. **The ultimate goal is to abolish the raising of farm animals, animals in medical research, in zoos or aquariums and to end the breeding and selling of pedigreed cats, purebred dogs and other pets.**

CFA's views:

Language can be a powerful influence on public attitude, but it does not alter the actions of individuals. If a person is a bad owner he would be a bad "guardian".

Ownership and property rights are essential privileges in a democratic government. Pet owners have a responsibility to protect and provide humane care for their animals. They also should retain the right to protect them from undue restrictions or seizure.

Laws are already in existence to address animal cruelty or abuse of animals and these can be strengthened when necessary. Courts can and do impose penalties on mistreatment of animals and CFA believes that animals as "sentient" property should be treated appropriately.

Pets may be members of the family, but they are not able to perceive responsibility for their actions toward others. Humans must often make decisions regarding their "rights". The "guardian" movement seeks to impose legal liability far exceeding what currently exists.

The assertion that a "guardian" is one who "adopts" rather than buys is intended to morally censure those who choose to raise, sell or buy pedigreed cats/purebred dogs or other animals. In fact, there is no evidence to show that "adopted" pets have any better chance of remaining in the home than those purchased. The first and only academic studies on relinquishment of dogs/cats to shelters clearly show that dogs and cats obtained from breeders and pet stores have a far lower risk factor than those "adopted" from shelters or obtained from friends.² The risk of pets being relinquished to shelters often depends on whether they meet their owners' expectations. Dedicated cat breeders sell home-raised, healthy pets with predictable appearance and personality traits and these animals are cherished in their homes.

When the word "guardian" is added to animal laws, supposedly meaning the same as owner, there are administrative costs and the stage is set for confusion. The only purpose for this exercise is to reinforce an ideology that supports animal "personhood" and to advance the goals of legal transformation that would invite future litigation of all kinds. This is not ultimately a moral issue but a legal one that would impact veterinarians, animal rescuers, breeders and sellers of animals as well as pet owners.

Do not help to legitimize this disingenuous agenda.

1. IDA's campaign policy - "Rather than refer to ourselves or others as "owners" of animals we share our lives with, we now refer to ourselves and others as "guardians" of our animal friends. Guardians do not buy or sell animals; instead they rescue and adopt." See the IDA web site for more: <http://www.idausa.org>
2. National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy studies. Cats purchased from breeders (3.4%) and; 4.8% of cats purchased from pet stores were later relinquished to shelters, while 14.3% of cats obtained from shelters were relinquished. Dogs whose owners paid \$100 or more were less likely to be relinquished. Salman et al, "Human and Animal Factors Related to the Relinquishment of Dogs and Cats" JAAWS 1(3) 98. See <http://www.petpopulation.org/>

To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee, please email Legislation@CFA.org